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INFO RUEHXC/ALL US CONSULATES IN MEXICO COLLECTIVE
RUEAHLA/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC|UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 MEXICO 001433

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR INL

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PREL, PGOV, PHUM, SNAR, KCRM, MX
SUBJECT: NARCO-VIOLENCE SPIKES, TOP COPS TARGETED

REF: A. TIJUANA 408
B. TIJUANA438
C. TIJUANA 438
D. CIUDAD JUAREZ 204

Summary

1. (SBU) Organized crime killings in 2008 are up over record numbers last year. Large scale shootouts around the country over the last two weeks have left dozens dead. And the cartels are not only killing each other but going after the police as well. Over the last ten days, assassins have killed high-ranking police officials in Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez and Mexico City, several of whom were close DEA contacts. Much of the violence can be attributed directly to GOM success in disrupting the cartels. While President Calderon is insistent the GOM is undeterred in its efforts, the attacks on police are taking a toll as they struggle to meet recruiting targets. End Summary.

2.(SBU) Mexican newspapers tally between 900 and 1100 organized crime homicides so far this year. Chihuahua, Baja California, and the State of Mexico each account for more than 10% of these homicides. The states of Sinaloa, Michoacan, and Guerrero also figure prominently in the murder count. The last two weeks have been particularly bloody with

a major shootout in Tijuana (April 26), which left 13 people dead, two back-to-back massacres in Guerrero (May 3 and 4) which left 17 ranchers dead, and a shootout in Zacatecas (May 6) which left 3 dead. The first 10 days of May registered over 100 drug-related homicides, almost 20 percent of which were law enforcement officials.

Month	Police/Military	Total
Jan	23	248
Feb	19	245
Mar	20	232
Apr	11	107
May 1-10	20	108
Total	93	940

OK Corral from Coast to Coast

3. (SBU) Mexico has been hit by a wave of violence across the country over the last two weeks.

-- Tijuana: The April 26 shootout among members of the Arrellano Felix Organization (AFO) left thirteen drug traffickers dead. Media speculate the violence resulted from a meeting of the rival factions which turned sour or the consequence of a kidnapping of members of opposing groups.

-- Guerrero: In two separate attacks in the southern state of Guerrero, 17 ranchers were killed by suspected drug hitmen. On May 4 at least 10 ranchers were killed in an attack by 40 armed men on the estate of a well-known and politically connected rancher, Rogaciano Alba Alvarez. The attack followed an attack on May 3 in which seven ranchers, who were on their way back from a meeting with Alba, were killed. The attack may have been an attempt to settle a score with Alba, whose two sons were killed in the attack and whose daughter was kidnapped. He had survived an earlier attempted assassination in Michoacan in 2006.

-- Zacatecas: On May 7, a clash between army soldiers and presumed cartel enforcers leaving an illegal horse race resulted in three deaths, including a young boy caught in the cross-fire.

-- Ciudad Juarez: Two-thousand troops and 500 federal police deployed to Chihuahua in late March may have resulted in restoring a semblance of order) media report that killings in the state appear to have declined from 25 per week to 26 in over the first three weeks of the operation.

Police Taking Major Hits

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4. (SBU) Law enforcement and military officials continue to be targeted with just under 100 drug-related homicides through early May. In the first 10 days of May, police became a prime target, with the killings in this short time frame making up over 20 percent of police homicides committed during the prior four months. High-profile police killings include:

-- On May 1, unknown gunmen assassinated Robert Velasco Bravo, head of the Organized Crime Department at the Secretariat of Public Security (SSP). Velasco was a trusted and respected colleague of the DEA, a leader in the DEA's Sensitive Investigative Unit (SIU) Program. Although initial reports indicated that he died during an attempted robbery, the discovery of a murder weapon with a silencer and multiple head wounds suggest that it was a professional hit.

-- On May 3, apparent car-jackers murdered Aristeo Gomez, a senior administrative officer within the SSP. (Ironically, the Embassy had been meeting with Gomez just days prior, discussing the provision of armored cars and other protective gear for USG-supported vetted units.)

-- On May 3, SSP Secretary Garcia Luna eulogized Velasco, as well as Gomez, four other PFP officials killed April 17 in Tijuana, and four PFP officials were killed May 2 in a confrontation in Culiacan, Sinaloa.

-- On May 7, assassins killed Saul Pena, a senior Ciudad Juarez (CJ) municipal police officer. He was the third policeman to be killed in CJ in a 24-hour period and the 20th police official killed in the city this year. Pena was due to be named one of CJ's five police commanders.

-- On May 8, a lone gunman shot and killed Edgar Eusebio Millan Gomez, the Federal Police's General Coordinator for Regional Security. Police captured the shooter (a recent

prison releasee) told police he had been paid by an unknown man \$10,000 to kill Millan. A close confidant of SSP's Garcia Luna, Millan coordinated state Federal Police delegates and was deeply in mixed police-military surges against the cartels. DEA had warned Millan that the Arturo BELTRAN-Leyva (ABL) organization reportedly had targeted him and two other high-ranking Federal Police officials because of the arrest of ABL's brother.

-- On May 9, Esteban Robles Espinoza (aka "El Lobo"), a top Mexico City police commander was shot seven times in his car by four attackers in a minivan near his home in the San Juan de Aragon neighborhood. Robles headed the Honor and Justice Commission, an internal affairs unit of the city's Attorney General's Office.

-- On May 10, deputy police chief of Ciudad Juarez, Juan Antonio Ramon Garcia, was shot dead. Garcia's name recently appeared on the top of a hit list found at a monument to dead officers.

Cause and Effect

5. (SBU) GOM success in disrupting the cartels)- in the form of pressure applied through massive military/police surges along with more targeted arrests based on improved intelligence -- lies at the heart of the much of the violence both within and between cartel organizations. Arrests and killings create power vacuums that criminals seek to fill, often with guns. While violence is always present in these organizations, its spread and nature is constantly changing, always ratcheting upwards in brutality) from heads rolling across dance floors, to the assassination of El Chapo Gunman's 22-year-old son on May 9 (someone we are not even sure was directly involved in the "family business").

6. (SBU) President Calderon insists the GOM is more determined than ever to win its war against organized crime. The violence against police is inevitably intimidating, however, and top police officials within DEA's Special Intelligence Unit (SIU) repeatedly have asked to be reassigned out from the SSP's elite anti-drug unit to "safer" areas of police work. In 2007, the SSP sought to hire 8,000 new college-educated recruits, but have received applications

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from barely half that number; the supposition is that

well-educated grads are unwilling to join, for one reason (the endemic violence) or another (e.g., the continuing low stature of police in Mexican society).

7. (SBU) For now we have no reason to expect a major shift in terms of the violence. As long as the GOM keeps the pressure on the cartels, we can expect continued outbreaks of violence within and between the cartels as well as in the form of striking out against authorities.

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GARZA